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# Agenda



Quarterly Newsletter of the  
National Federation of Press Women

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New Mexico's  
**Sherri Burr**  
NFPW 2021 COA



## *President's Message: Going forward*

**By Karen Rowley**  
**NFPW President**

Like many of you, I first joined NFPW at the urging of a colleague to enter the communications contest. That was 20 years ago — and I have to admit, I never contemplated the possibility that I would stay with the organization this long, much less serve as president one day.

But here I am, and it's a direct result of the many accomplished, dedicated, interesting members I've met through the years. I've been both inspired by them and encouraged by their support.

There's a sense of symmetry for me in being elected president this year. The first NFPW conference I attended was in Indianapolis in 2001. That conference was scheduled to start Sept. 13 — which turned out to be two days after 9/11. The incomprehensible tragedy left the board — led by the late Vivian Sadowski of Kansas — with the difficult decision about whether to proceed with the conference.

For many reasons, they decided to go ahead, and despite all the obstacles, a large number of members managed to make it to Indianapolis. I remember being incredibly impressed by the tenacity and the creativity of these women and men, and by their willingness to adapt to the situation and make it work.

Twenty years and many conferences later, I found myself part of a board faced with a similarly difficult decision — whether (and how) to proceed with the 2021 conference. Again, for many reasons, we decided to go ahead with the conference — albeit virtually — and it is a testament once more, I think, to the tenacity, the creativity and the willingness to adapt that NFPW members have consistently shown.

Indeed, Arkansas Press Women displayed all of those traits in the just-concluded Little Rock conference as they shifted gears from planning for an in-person meeting to organizing a virtual meeting. The conference sessions

were interesting and engaging, and the number of members who attended was truly gratifying because none of us was quite sure what to expect.

Going forward, I'd like NFPW to focus on four areas.

The first is our advocacy for a free press and the First Amendment. As we have seen over the past several years, both a free press and the First Amendment are more critical than ever in our highly opinionated, sharply divided society. We're going to be exploring some concrete actions NFPW can take to further these goals, and I welcome any thoughts any of you might have.

The second is the organization's place in our rapidly changing and evolving communications field. Together with the board, I want to spend some time reimagining and retooling NFPW a bit so that it remains relevant, valuable and true to its core values as we move into the future. That includes looking at such things as how we can increase membership, provide more useful resources for members and make better use of our social media presence.

The third is encouraging young people to pursue mass communications as a career and younger communications professionals to stay in the field. I want to continue NFPW's efforts in this area because the future of the communications field and the role it plays in our society will be dependent on the younger generation.

Finally, next year — 2022 — will be NFPW's 85th anniversary. That's a tremendous milestone, and I think we should celebrate it appropriately when we meet in Fargo, North Dakota, for our conference. So, the board and I will be working to come up with a plan for that. If any of you have any thoughts or suggestions about such a celebration, please feel free to share them with us.

I'm grateful to have the privilege of serving as NFPW's 45th president, and I look forward to working with and for all of you over the next two years.

### *On the Cover:*

New Mexico Press Women's Sherri Burr was named the NFPW 2021 Communicator of Achievement during the virtual conference in June. Please read more about this extraordinary woman's life and career starting on page 3 of this issue of Agenda.





# 2021 COA embraces ‘sisterhood’ of NFPW

**By Karen Stensrud**  
**COA Director**

Each year — whether in person, or as the past two years have required, virtually — NFPW members take time during our Communicator of Achievement (COA) celebration to hear about the tremendous professional and personal accomplishments of each nominee. This year was no exception as we presented 10 inspiring nominees, each of them a standout honored as their affiliate’s 2021 Communicator of Achievement.

As we recapped a few details about the runner-up and winner before officially revealing their names, emotion began to build for Sherri Burr. Moments later, Burr, a member of New Mexico Press Women, was announced as the 2021 NFPW Communicator of Achievement.

“I thought these women were absolutely amazing,” Burr said of this year’s COA class. “Any one of them could win. When Karen Stensrud started discussing the winner’s background, I realized she was talking about me. By the time she was finished, I was openly weeping. I just couldn’t believe I’d won such a prestigious award.”

In her remarks as newly announced COA, Burr acknowledged the “sisterhood” of her affiliate and NFPW. The term seemed especially appropriate, given the ways in which family connections are intertwined with several of Burr’s notable accomplishments.

## **Law professor, author and journalist**

Burr, who grew up in Phoenix, graduated from Mount Holyoke College and went on to complete a joint graduate degree program, earning her masters in public affairs from Princeton University and her juris doctorate from Yale Law School. She taught for three decades at the University of New Mexico Law School and wrote more than two dozen law books. She also created, produced and hosted “Arts Talk,” a television program to teach



**Sherri Burr**

students about entertainment law; the award-winning show ran from 1998 to 2015 in New Mexico and Hawaii.

She wrote a weekly column for the Albuquerque Tribune, published travel articles in the Albuquerque Journal and continues to write columns for the Southwest Sage.

Burr is serving her second term as president of New Mexico Press Women and has spoken on media and law to her affiliate and at NFPW conferences.

She has served on the boards of Albuquerque Arts and Albuquerque Public Arts, and is a member of the Albuquerque Museum board of trustees, the Authors Guild Foundation board of directors and the Aaron Burr Association board of directors. She is also a member of the New Mexico Black Lawyers Association and SouthWest Writers.

Burr’s first history book, “Complicated Lives: Free Blacks in Virginia, 1691-1865,” was published in 2019 and nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in history. While researching the book, she delved further into her family roots, finding she was a direct descendant of Aaron Burr, a politician and lawyer who served as vice president of the United States under Thomas Jefferson.

Burr noted that the first NFPW conference she attended was in 2007 in Richmond, Virginia, where former Gov. Doug Wilder, a descendant of enslaved people, was the keynote speaker.

“I was impressed that NFPW put together a multicultural event celebrating Virginia’s diverse heritage,” Burr said. It was only later, thanks to research she did while attending the conference in Salt Lake City, that Burr discovered her paternal ancestors had lived as Free Blacks and owned property just south of Richmond. That’s part of why, Burr added, she looks forward to greet-

*(Continued on page 4)*

# 2021 COA . . .

(Continued from page 3)

ing her Press Women sisters (and brothers) at conferences and learning about their lives in other states.

Burr said the NFPW Communicator of Achievement Award is very meaningful, representing "recognition by my Press Women sisters (and brothers) that I have succeeded in the communications field as an author, journalist, broadcaster and leader."

The fifth New Mexican to receive the honor, Burr said it "meant a great deal to me after what has been a difficult decade since my only full brother became severely ill and then passed away."

## *What is the Communicator of Achievement award?*

Each year at its annual communications conference, the National Federation of Press Women names a communicator of achievement.

The award, the highest honor bestowed by NFPW, is given to members who have distinguished themselves within and beyond their profession.

The national winner is chosen by an independent panel of judges from nominees presented by state affiliates based on exceptional achievement in the communications field, service to NFPW and impact in the community.

Each year, the COA and runner-up are announced at the Communicator of Achievement Award Banquet during NFPW's annual conference. All the nominees are recognized and honored at the banquet before the winner is announced.

Also fitting, and "particularly poignant" for Burr, was that the award came at the culmination of the conference hosted by our Arkansas affiliate.

"I consider myself a daughter and granddaughter of Hope, Arkansas," Burr explained, "from which my maternal family moved in the 1950s."

### **Mary Jane Skala, COA Runner-up Nebraska Press Women**

NFPW's 2021 COA runner-up was Mary Jane Skala of Kearney, Nebraska, an award-winning newspaper editor and reporter. For 20 years, Skala was a senior editor at the Sun News, the suburban arm of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, and was named one of Ohio's Top Ten Journalists. She worked at the Kearney Hub for three years before serving as a volunteer coordinator at Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center in New Mexico, returning to the Hub as a reporter and columnist in 2017. She has won numerous NFPW awards, including the sweepstakes award of the communication contest.



**Mary Jane Skala**

Our other amazing COA nominees were Jane Falany, Alabama Media Professionals; Marie Fasano, Arizona Professional Writers; Tammy Keith, Arkansas Press Women; Karen Petersen, Colorado Press Women; Roxane Ferguson, Delaware Press Association; Beth Bower, Kansas Professional Communicators; Tammy Fogle, North Dakota Professional Communicators; and Patty Kruszewski, Virginia Professional Communicators. Their bios can be found starting on page 5.

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**September 10** is the deadline for the next issue of Agenda,  
due out **October 1**

# Competition for COA award was tough: Here are the other candidates

Congratulations to all of these accomplished NFPW professionals, each named her state affiliate's 2021 Communicator of Achievement.

## **Jane Falany** **Alabama Media Professionals**

Jane N. Falany spent most of her career at Southern Company, where she worked in public relations at Alabama Power Co. and Southern Nuclear Operating Co. from 1982 to 2005. After retiring from Alabama Power, Jane was an adjunct instructor at the University of Alabama and Samford University.



**Jane Falany**

Jane is a published author who has worked as a freelance writer since 2005 and is a contract editor. A 40-year member of Alabama Media Professionals (AMP) and NFPW, Jane currently serves as NFPW treasurer. Jane is also a former president of AMP, which named her its Communicator of Achievement in 1993 and again in 2021. Jane has a passion for community service and has worked with local and statewide nonprofit organizations, including United Way of Central Alabama and the Alabama chapter of the American Cancer Society.

## **Marie Fasano** **Arizona Professional Writers**

Born in New York, Marie A. Fasano now lives in Arizona. As a nurse, she worked in hospitals and home health agencies and as a nursing instructor. Marie published her first article in 1976 and continued as a writer and photojournalist alongside her nursing career.



**Marie Fasano**

A licensed pilot, Marie had opportunities to fly in to airports, both to visit clients as an RN and to write travel stories for aviation publications. In her volunteer work, she flew to clinics in Mexico.

Marie has published books in the health care field about the study of aging and a memoir of her mother, "Tessie's Tales." She edited two nationwide magazines and wrote numerous articles for newspapers and magazines, often focusing on an individual's unique story.

A frequent NFPW communications contest award winner, Marie writes a column called "Roaming the Rim" for the Payson Roundup.

## **Tammy Keith** **Arkansas Press Women**

Tammy Keith of Conway, Arkansas, has more than 36 years of experience as a newspaper reporter, columnist and editor.

A *cum laude* journalism graduate of Arkansas State University, Tammy started at age 20 at The Jonesboro Sun, later working at the Log Cabin Democrat in Conway, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in Little Rock and a statewide magazine.

During her career, Tammy has covered everything from Big Foot to tornadoes and school shootings. A 12-time winner of the Arkansas Press Women communications contest sweepstakes, Tammy is also a three-time NFPW sweepstakes winner and four-time runner-up.

Tammy retired in 2019 to devote more time to being an active grandmother — while continuing her writing career as a freelance journalist and volunteer judge for journalism contests.



**Tammy Keith**

*(Continued on page 6)*



# COA candidates for 2021 . . .

*(Continued from page 5)*

## **Karen Pochert Petersen** *Colorado Press Women*

Karen Petersen, a CPW member since 2010, boldly champions environmental and social change. Karen thought about resigning as communications strategist for the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) when the past administration forbade the use of phrases such as “climate change.” Instead, she stayed, finding workarounds to convey critical messages without raising ire.



**Karen Petersen**

Indeed, communicating messages in compelling, engaging and accessible prose has been a hallmark of her work at NREL — where she established a still-active writers’ working group — winning her numerous awards.

A former deacon and elder in the Presbyterian church, Karen has long worked for social justice. After helping return a Native American infant wrongly taken from her family, Karen spearheaded passage of a state law to require a court order in such cases.

Karen also volunteered countless hours for an annual Boulder gala to fight hunger and was dubbed a “rock star” by the event chair.

## **Roxane Ferguson** *Delaware Press Association*

DPA Vice President  
Roxane Ferguson is the dynamic executive director of the Middletown Area Chamber of Commerce. Roxane says effective communication — verbal, visual, written — fosters stronger relationships among Delaware businesses and is the foundation on



**Roxane Ferguson**

which far-reaching chamber success rests.

She’s created Delaware and NFPW award-winning newsletters, postcards, brochures and media advisories, a substantial business directory and community guide, videos, ad campaigns and the website for the Chamber.

An effective change agent, Roxane has launched nonprofits, leadership and networking groups, and Delaware’s first business incubator and collaborative work space (which generated 57 businesses, 197 new jobs and \$37 million in state revenue). Roxane’s longtime service to Rotary International includes co-hosting a weekly radio show on community concerns, raising funds for a barrier-free playground for children of all abilities and volunteering with area senior communities.

Roxane is honorary commander for the Delaware National Guard and Dover Air Force Base airlift wings.

## **Beth Bower** *Kansas Professional Communicators*

Beth Bower is a writer, editor and documentary producer whose passion is writing . . . and communicating.

After high school, Beth enlisted in the Air Force and became its first woman helicopter mechanic. She found that mechanics communicate but don’t necessarily write. She found outlets by working toward her degree and writing short stories.

She graduated from college and settled in Wichita, where she found work doing what she loved — writing! She wrote for The Derby Daily Reporter and The Wichita Eagle, serving as advertising editor and producing special sections and magazines.

Beth’s passion for food — and writing — converged in numerous holiday cookbook publications and a documentary about Kansas pie for PBS. Recognized for her



**Beth Bower**

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# COA candidates for 2021 . . .

(Continued from page 6)

work, Beth is a past president of WPC, Wichita's perpetual fundraising mixer chair and an at-large member. She supports many local nonprofits and is a 2012 Kansas Woman of Distinction.

Beth's current projects include another cookbook and fried chicken documentary.

## **Tammy Fogle** *North Dakota Professional Communicators*

Tammy Fogle graduated from Minnesota State University Moorhead with a bachelor's degree in mass communications. Her professional career started in broadcast at WDAY-TV in Fargo. While there, Tammy directed the evening newscasts, produced special video segments and assisted with production of client TV commercials.

Next, Tammy dove headfirst into marketing at the Fargo Park District. She was in charge of marketing efforts for the entire district and quickly learned on her own how to manage all aspects of marketing. Now highly skilled in digital marketing, Tammy has a new focus at North Dakota State College of Science. Her expertise is primarily in email marketing, website management, social media strategy and video production.



**Tammy Fogle**

Tammy lives in Fargo and is actively involved in her church and local 4-H organization.

## **Patty Kruszewski** *Virginia Professional Communicators*

Patty Kruszewski holds a sociology degree from Virginia Tech and a master's degree in public administration from Lamar University.

She is managing editor of The Henrico Citizen, where she has earned more than 200 writing and photography awards.



**Patty Kruszewski**

A former ambassador for Richmond's Chamber of Commerce, Patty was named Henrico Business Leader of the Year in 2008 and Henrico PAL Board Member of the Year for 2015.

Since 2012, when she lost her youngest daughter to a distracted driver, Patty also has been active with safe-driving groups and organizations advocating for cyclists and pedestrians.

In 2013, she was the runner-up for the Richmond Times-Dispatch's correspondent of the year honors. She continues to speak regularly to community and business groups about safety topics and in 2015 was named a traffic safety champion by Drive Smart Virginia.

## **Yes, you can donate to your favorite charity without spending a dime!**

Simply shop at AmazonSmile, and AmazonSmile will donate a percentage of each purchase to your designated cause. You can designate the **NFPW Education Fund** to help the foundation continue its good works, which include funding the annual high school contest, first-timers awards, and research and education grants for NFPW members.



# Texas senator wins sweepstakes award

**By Terri Ehresman**  
**Contest Chair**

Winning awards is nothing new to Judith Zaffirini of Laredo, Texas. During her career, she has received more than 1,100 awards for her legislative, public service and professional work. This year she achieved another milestone award when she was named sweepstakes winner in the NFPW communications contest.

Zaffirini is a Texas senator and communications business owner who also has 13 years of teaching experience, including college and university levels. She is the first Hispanic woman elected to the Texas Senate and is the second highest-ranking senator after she was re-elected in 2020 in her 10th landslide victory.

This year she won 24 first-place awards in the Press Women of Texas communications contest. Those entries advanced to the national contest where she won first-place honors for communications programs and campaigns, audiovisuals, for her Communication and Presentation Skills for Virtual Courts audiovisual program. She also won first place for a public service program or campaign for her 2020 Constituent Outreach Program.

She won second-place honors for public relations materials, catalog, manual or handbook, for her manual "Class in the Courtroom: Access to Justice Mock Trial Series, 2019-2020." She also won second-place honors for a single advertisement, Seguin Voter's Guide Ad. She placed second for news or feature releases, multiple releases, for her Zoom webinar press releases and second for a social media campaign, nonprofit, government or educational, focusing on "Judith Zaffirini, Texas State Senator."

She also finished in second place for publications regularly written by entrant, newsletter/other publication, nonprofit, government or educational, for her report to families in the Texas district she represents.

She won third-place awards for her speech accepting the LULAC Council 12 lifetime achievement award; advertising poster, billboard or banner for her election billboard, and for a personal opinion column examining "Cult of Glory."



**Texas Senator and NFPW Sweepstakes Winner  
Judith Zaffirini**

She won honorable mention awards for a radio or television, interview; web and social media, web copy; communications programs and campaigns, crisis communications; and publication regularly edited by entrant, newsletter/other publication, nonprofit, government or educational.

Zaffirini was honored as sweepstakes winner in June during an online NFPW awards ceremony. She won \$250 cash and a plaque for finishing in first place.

NFPW President Gwen Larson praised Zaffirini for her accomplishments.

"Judith Zaffirini is a talented communications

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# Sweepstakes winner . . .

*(Continued from page 8)*

professional who understands the many different channels available to share one's message. Being able to adapt messages to a myriad of outlets is a special talent."

Mary Jane Skala of Kearney, Nebraska, a reporter for the Kearney Hub, finished in second place in the sweepstakes competition. She writes features and covers health issues for her newspaper. She also writes a weekly column about moving to the sometimes-quirky corn and cattle country after 40 years as a newspaper editor in Cleveland. She was the NFPW sweepstakes winner in 2020 and 1996. Skala is an accomplished writer and consistently finishes in the top three in the national contest. She received a check for \$100 for finishing in second place.

Finishing in third place was Lori Potter, who retired earlier this year after more than four decades as a writer and photographer for the Kearney Hub. Potter, also of Kearney, Nebraska, is a former NFPW national president

and currently serves as treasurer of the NFPW Education Fund, the 501(c)3 arm of the organization. Potter holds the NFPW record for most sweepstakes wins in the contest. She was the national winner in 2018, 2014, 2012 and 2008.

## Delaware wins again

For the eighth consecutive year, Delaware Press Association captured the first-place affiliate award. Delaware also won the top affiliate award in 2007 and 2011.

A distinguished group of professional journalists, communications specialists and educators judged nearly 2,000 entries in a wide variety of categories. Only first-place winning entries at the state level are eligible to enter the national contest. All entries were published or broadcast between Jan. 1, 2020, and Dec. 31, 2020.

For a complete list of the contest winners, please go to the [NFPW website](#).

# Best of the Best winner hails from Texas

## By Teri Ehresman Contest Chair

A student from a high school in Texas is the recipient of the National Federation of Press Women's Award of Achievement for the high school communications contest sponsored by the NFPW Education Fund.

Sumit Nalavade, a junior from Heritage High School in Frisco, Texas, is the sixth high school student from Texas to win the honor, commonly referred to as the "Best of the Best" award in high school communications. Students from Ohio and Delaware have also won the award during the eight years the award has been given.



Sumit Nalavade

Nalavade won a \$250 cash award for Best of the Best and \$100 for winning the top award in the video news story category. His high school communications program also received a \$250 check.

Nearly 2,000 students participated in this year's contest. Students first competed in a statewide communications contest, and first-place winners were advanced to the national round of competition. In states where a contest was not offered, NFPW hosted an at-large contest with the first-place winners also advancing to the national competition.

The first-place winners in each category received a \$100 cash prize. The student winners were honored during a Zoom awards ceremony in May.

The national high school winners list is available on the NFPW website: <https://www.nfpw.org/2021-high-school-communications-contest-winners>.

# *Press Women walk path of suffragettes*

By Karen Peterson

COA Nominee

Colorado Press Women

Once again, the NFPW Conference has stirred my soul, stoked my fire and replenished my passion.

My takeaway from this year's NFPW conference ties in to my latest writing assignment — a blog about the visionary women leading the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe's transition to a solar-powered future.

It begins, "In traditional Iroquois society, women were the keepers of culture."

That was the first gem my research uncovered. What responsibilities did that entail? I wondered, as I dug a little deeper.

Turns out, women wielded significant status and power in the Iroquois system of government — a democratic confederacy that informed and inspired our own democracy.

Except for the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making part. That took us a while. And we're still working on it . . . refining the story to better reflect the ideals espoused by our Constitution — a framework for justice and equality modeled after that of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Notably, women's prominent role in shaping Iroquois society traces all the way back to Skywoman, the hero

at the center of their creation story.

In the beginning, when the earth was but a glimmer in the Creator's eye, Skywoman slid through a hole in the sky — a hole created when her husband uprooted the tree of life.

Guided by her inherent ingenuity, Skywoman partnered with the birds and water animals to sprinkle the soil that gave rise to life on earth.

Sustaining that life became the sacred responsibility of her daughter and granddaughters in a matriarchal society where women held so much sway they served as the inspiration for our own suffragette sisters.

Sisters like Ida B. Wells. As we heard from her great-granddaughter Michelle Duster, who delivered the conference keynote, Ida B the QUEEN not only fought the fights, marched in the rallies and got in good trouble, she also told the stories . . . the ones Michelle is still telling today.

Sisters like Elizabeth Eckford of the Little Rock Nine, whose courage on The Worst First Day opened the doors to the up-and-coming Central High reporter Emily Jefferson, who is forging a career from today.

These sisters are the stewards of stories. And in fulfilling that role they inspire us all to dig deeper. Listen closer. Think bigger. Fight harder. Be better.

Take a moment to ponder that.



Karen Peterson

That is the power of story.

The stories we tell have generational impact. They influence how we plant the seeds, nurture their growth, define our roles, inform our decisions, shape our society, protect our environment, preserve our culture, and yes, even sustain our system of government.

Much as the modern-day Mohawk women I interviewed are following in the footsteps of Skywoman, we Press Women are walking the walk of the suffragette storytellers who paved the way for us.

We have a sacred duty to lean into our inherited role as the shapers of democracy . . . and finish the story they started.



**National Federation of Press Women**

## **Alaska Professional Communicators**

Sylvia Ciernick Broady, 96, died April 15, 2021. With a bachelor's degree in journalism and a doctorate in communications from Michigan State University, Sylvia was hired as a professor/director of public information at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 1963. After accompanying her husband on various postings overseas, she resumed her career as a university professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage. After retiring in 1995, Sylvia returned to UAA in 1999 to serve as its interim vice chancellor. Her career brought her many honors from the Advertising Federation of Alaska, Public Relations Society of America, Alaska Professional Communicators and NFPW.



## **Connecticut Press Club**

Amy Oestreicher died April 7, 2021, just days shy of her 34<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her second book, "Creativity and Gratitude," was published just days earlier. At age 18, Amy suffered major medical issues requiring more than two dozen surgeries over the years — including the removal of her stomach — but persevered to return to her love of acting and performing in her one-woman show, "Gutless & Grateful: A Musical Feast," based on hundreds of pages of her journals.



Amy also was an artist and wrote two books. Her first was "My Beautiful Detour: An Unthinkable Journey from Gutless to Grateful." She joined NFPW as a student in March.

## **Illinois Woman's Press Association**

Olga Gize Carlisle, 94, died Feb. 19, 2021. Born in East Chicago, Olga graduated from the Ernie Pyle School of Journalism at Indiana University. Olga started her 60-year career at The Freeport Journal Standard at a time when few married women were in the workforce, becoming one of the first women managing editors at the newspaper. She wrote her "Around the Table" column every day for decades.



A dedicated print journalist, photo-journalist, food editor, book author and columnist, she was a five-time winner of the IWPA Writer of the Year award, the 1982 NFPW Communicator of Achievement and the 2007 Illinois Journalist of the Year. She held many offices in IWPA and served eight years on the NFPW Education Fund board.

## **Iowa Press Women**

Julie Hoffman, 53, died May 21, 2021, after a nearly six-year battle with colon cancer. Hoffman had worked at American Laboratories in Omaha for 27 years before retiring



as production coordinator because of her cancer. She had been president of Iowa Press Women, as well as serving as president of a Beta Sigma Phi council and chapter. She had just reached her 15-year membership milestone with NFPW. Hoffman is survived her sister and fellow NFPW member Marsha Hoffman.

A memorial has been established with the NFPW Education Fund.

## **Missouri Professional Communicators**

Mary Ellen Brucker, 94, died April 26, 2021. She settled in Webster Groves, a St. Louis suburb, following a reporting stint for Voice of America in New York and Washington, D.C., writing for Korean, Hungarian and Chinese news services. In her husband's hometown, she became a PR professional, working for an agency and the school district.



A Stanford University graduate, Brucker encouraged local journalists to participate in professional organizations, judged communications contests, provided programs based on her worldwide travels and photography and attended MPC events in St. Louis.

A member of the Photographic Society of America, she and her husband won the PSA's national travelogue competition twice, and she earned PSA's highest honor in 2015.

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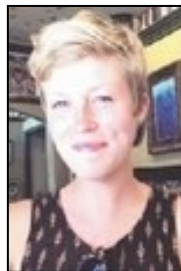


## *We Remember . . .*

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### **New Mexico Press Women**

Hannah Colton, 29, died Nov. 10, 2021. A creative talent who enjoyed music composition and dance along with being an outdoor enthusiast who led summer backpacking trips for young adults and teens, Hannah at the time of her death was the newsroom director and public health re-



porter for KUNM public radio station in Albuquerque. Her deep regard for the diversity of human experience drew her to listen to and share stories, particularly those of marginalized people, through the medium of radio. Her first radio job was with KDLG in Dillingham, Alaska.

She won first place in the 2021 NFPW communications contest for talk show as part of a team but died before the winners were announced at the national conference.

During the recent NFPW conference, we paid tribute to members who died since the last in-person conference in June 2019 and the June 2021 virtual conference. The tributes are online at <https://www.nfpw.org/2021-memorials>.

Some of the obituaries in this issue of Agenda were not received in time to be included in that tribute.

## *Affiliate and Member News . . .*

### **Nebraska Press Women**

NFPW members are invited to attend Nebraska's 75th anniversary celebration at the affiliate's first in-person gathering in two years.

The fall conference will be held Oct. 9 in Grand Island.

NPW President Lori Potter said the affiliate hopes to have past presidents Gwen Larson and Marsha Hoff-

man as special guests for the event.

Details about speakers and venues will be published in the NFPW E-letter and Agenda prior to the Oct. 9 conference.

# Celebrating 75 Years

# NFPW

*Oct. 9 Fall Conference. Join us.* [nebraskapresswomen.org](https://nebraskapresswomen.org)



## Nebraska Press Women

*a community of communicators*

## Affiliate and Member News . . .

### Kay Stephens Pennsylvania Press Women

NFPW member Kay Stephens and two other Penn State University alumni were featured recently in a newsletter generated by the PSU Bellisario College of Communications.

"Determined Professionals" by Elena Rose says the stories of the three "aren't all that different from one another — at least, professionally. ... Their roles certainly differ."

Stephens, 65, graduated from Penn State in 1977, Greg Pickel in 2015 and Carter Walker in 2017.

"Stephens is an Altoona Mirror veteran, who has continued to report the news in her community for 44 years; Pickel, 28, acts as the sports manager of the digital media outlet PennLive and its print component, the Patriot-News in Harrisburg, where he has reported and edited for over a decade; and Walker, 26, has served the Lancaster community for more than three years as a county government and investigative reporter for the LNP Media Group."

Each of three said their outlets, regularly produced print newspapers, have "felt hit in various ways — some drastic and some more predictable and recoverable" in the changing media landscapes.

"However, as digital media advances, the once vital, national and local role played by newspaper continues to diminish."

Despite all that, "each of the three journalists voices the same sentiment: an unwavering passion for delivering the news their communities need."

The article continues:

"Stephens' favorite part of her job is telling people what they don't know.

"Over the past four-plus decades she has spent with the Mirror, she has managed to share that information across the newspaper's ... circulation area."



Despite challenges and changes to the business model, journalist Kay Stephens remains determined about the impact and importance of local journalism.

"From reporting on general assignments, education, municipal and county government and county court, as well as copy editing and designing pages for the newspaper, Stephens has left a mark in many sections of the Mirror's print and online products.

"... as media landscapes continue to evolve, she has found it increasingly difficult for the newspaper to produce its best print product (the Mirror's more prioritized mode of news sharing) versus its online and social media platforms.

"We're trying to do as much as we can do with the staff we have, but it's not enough to suit me, because I know what it used to be," Stephens said. "Some other people might say, the day of wide-ranging coverage in your newspaper ... maybe they are behind us. Because people are getting their [news] from other sources."

"Financial issues at the Mirror have prompted staff cuts, which further contribute to operational impacts for the outlet. According to Stephens, the Mirror currently employs five full-time news reporters. At its fullest staff — last

attained during the 1990s — the Mirror had 12 full-time news reporters.

"Due to a multitude of reasons, Stephens also noted the Mirror sometimes struggles with producing enough content to fill an entire newspaper.

"If you would have asked [what I am passionate about] two years ago, I would have said, just looking into anything and everything," Stephens said. "But what I'm passionate about now is trying to keep the paper filled on a daily basis with stories. We have so few reporters that we have to devote our resources to making sure we have stories in the paper. Otherwise, it's just a tough day."

"Despite her concerns related to the Mirror and local media, Stephens said she knows local journalists will continue to play crucial roles in their communities.

"The Mirror is one of many local newspapers still trying to 'do it all,' she said, as they continue to provide a wide range of reporting — local and national news, entertainment

*(Continued on page 14)*

## Affiliate and Member News . . .

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information, sports, obituaries, comics and more.

"Newspaper journalists especially are the ones who are asking important questions, looking for information to share with their readers," Stephens said. "And more than likely, [they] are the ones who are going to raise challenges when it comes to closed-door meetings that violate the state's Sunshine Law."

"When reflecting on her career at the Mirror, she recalled covering stories from the Johnstown Flood of 1977 to county court jury trials to illegal drug rings in the area. On a day-to-day basis, though, she tries to dig for those stories to deliver to the community — double checking the county court calendar, attending court and county governmental hearings and keeping tabs on 'dozens' of criminal and civil court cases.

"The day-to-day work of a newspaper reporter [at a] small city publication hasn't changed significantly," Stephens said. "I'm always looking every day for something new to tell the readers."

"Upon asking Stephens what her strengths are, she recalled a memory from years past. While covering an Altoona Area School Board meeting, Stephens witnessed a local taxpayer and parent tell the board that without Stephens' reporting on meetings, she wouldn't be able to understand the board's actions. That memory still sticks with Stephens.

"At that time, and still today, I consider that comment to be high praise," Stephens said. "Based on the way some of our local governing boards conduct their meetings, it can be — but shouldn't be — difficult to understand what our local leaders are doing."

"As media landscapes continue to evolve, Stephens said she sometimes struggles when trying to predict what is ahead for the Mirror and newspapers everywhere. In Stephens' mind, putting together a plan for the Mirror that involves more online and digital resources seems smart.

"However, she said she respects the newspaper's ownership at Ogden Newspapers, which owns over 50 daily newspapers across the country — including 12 print products in

Pennsylvania — as well as multiple weeklies and a magazine division.

"According to Stephens, Ogden Newspapers has not chosen to feed extensive resources into the Mirror's digital presence. She said the Mirror will continue to carry out a print-first focus — likely catering largely to older readers — and that for, 'right now, that's okay.'

"She plans to keep doing her job every day, no matter the Mirror's mode of news sharing. 'I don't know; I think newspapers are going to be around forever. But, at the same time, I see them changing,' Stephens said. 'I see other avenues popping up to provide information, but I can tell you that, as far as local news goes, it's your local newspaper that's still trying to do its job.'

"And they'll keep trying to do their job until there's not enough money for that."

(Editor's Note: To read the entire article, including the more in-depth interviews with the other two alumni, please go to [The Communicator](#) newsletter online.)

### North Dakota Press Women

will host next year's communications conference for NFPW.

The exact dates haven't been set but newly installed NFPW President Karen Rowley says, "It will be in June 2022."

Conference chairmen have yet to be named.

Details will be published in upcoming issues of Agenda and on the NFPW website.



*Just a thought . . .*



**By Cathy Koon**

**Media Network Idaho, Agenda Editor**

Returning home from Colorado in early May, I took an unplanned detour to Independence Rock in Wyoming.

Unplanned, for those who don't know my penchant for taking detours, means I got lost. I always think I know exactly where I am and where I'm headed. The upside of being lost is the unique and beautiful places I wouldn't have seen otherwise.

Independence Rock is in the middle of nowhere in dry, desert country. It was a stopping off place for westward-bound emigrants looking for new lives in the West. Many of my ancestors came to Utah and Idaho that way, and I wondered if any of them had stopped and left their marks on this piece of barren granite, 1,900 feet long and 700 feet wide, rising 128 feet above the valley floor.

Unless they left some kind of diary to commemorate such an event, I will probably never know for sure. Some of the names were painted with axle grease, others chiseled with whatever tools they had. Over the past 150 or so years, most of the axle grease has worn off and the constant Wyoming winds have eroded the names until most are unreadable.

I stood alone outside the chain-link fence meant to

protect the rock from damage by visitors and tried to imagine what it must have been like for those pioneers to stand in much the same spot and know they still had a long journey ahead of them.

As a young girl, I wanted to be Laura Ingalls Wilder and experience such a journey. Now, I wonder if I would have made a good pioneer. How would I have done, walking hundreds of miles through wild country, watching for rattlesnakes, Indians and other dangers. Through mud and sand, or crossing raging rivers, living on scarce rations and not being able to bathe or wash my hair on a regular basis.

And I wonder what my pioneer ancestors would think of me and my world. I have tried to be a pioneer in my own way, being active in my community and in my profession. Always, I have tried to leave things better than I found them.

But any mark I leave behind is likely to be just as impermanent as those names carved into Independence Rock. My lasting legacy is likely to be found in newspaper archives in bylined news articles and features spanning a 30-year career as a communicator.

In my own way, maybe I am a pioneer.

# NFPW Leadership Directory

## 2021 ELECTED OFFICERS

### President:

Karen Rowley, Louisiana

### Vice President:

Julie Campbell, Virginia

### Secretary:

Meredith Cummings, Alabama

### Treasurer:

Debbie Miller, Arkansas

### Immediate Past President:

Gwen Larson, Kansas

## APPOINTED BOARD

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Paula Casey, At-Large

### Communicator of Achievement Director:

Karen Stensrud, North Dakota

### FAN Co-Directors:

Marsha Shuler, Louisiana

Angela Smith, Texas

### Historian:

Amy Geiszler-Jones, Kansas

### Assistant Historian:

Mary Pat Finn-Hoag, Nebraska

### Hospitality and Protocol:

Catherine Petrini, Virginia & D.C.

### Parliamentarian:

Allison Stein, Missouri

### POPPS President:

Mark Fowser, Delaware

### Presidential Adviser — Conference Liaison:

Meg Hunt, South Carolina

### Presidential Adviser — Membership:

Cynthia Price, Virginia

### Presidential Adviser — Contest Director:

Teri Ehresman, Idaho

### Student Membership Director:

Unfilled

### Publications Director:

Cathy Koon, Idaho

### Publications Assistant:

Unfilled

### Web Director:

Cate Langley, NFPW Executive Director

### 2022 Conference Co-Directors:

Unfilled

## NFPW Headquarters

Cate Langley, Executive Director  
140B Purcellville Gateway Drive  
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Purcellville, VA 20132

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[info@nfpw.org](mailto:info@nfpw.org)

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